

Testimony
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee Public Hearing
March 5, 2009

**HB 6335 AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT
HEALTH CENTER FACILITIES PLAN**

Senator Handley, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, my name is Frank Santoro and I am a fourth year medical student at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. I am here today to speak in support of HB6335, An Act Concerning the University of Connecticut Health Center Facilities Plan.

While applying to medical school four years ago, I was looking for an institution filled with individuals who would maximize my potential and guide me to become the best physician I could be. As the first member of my family to attend college, let alone medical school, I needed to find a place where I felt I could find mentors who would provide me with professional guidance. I chose to attend the University of Connecticut School of Medicine because I felt that the academic physicians were committed to both medical education and research and most importantly, to the personal development of young physicians.

The quality of teaching and integration of basic scientists into our curriculum is one of the greatest strengths of the school. When I speak with friends at other medical schools and compare the first two years of my curriculum to theirs, I believe that UConn's ranks far superior in terms of organization and educational objectives. I sit on two curriculum committees and can attest to the hard work on behalf of the faculty—both basic scientists and physicians. Since the medical school is situated within the health center, we enjoy the benefits of being able to incorporate basic scientists (Ph.D.) into our medical school curriculum. Many of these researchers are not formally trained in clinical medicine, but with the help of the physicians (MDs) at our school, they are able to tailor their teaching to the medical field. For example, Dr. Bruce White, a NIH funded Ph.D. scientist at the health center who does not have any formal clinical training, teaches our first year section on metabolism and endocrinology and year after year students honor him with teaching awards for his excellence in the classroom. Incorporating research scientists within the health center enhances medical educational and ultimately produces better clinicians.

Another benefit of having a medical school situated within a medical campus is the ability to develop research projects. During the summer between my first and second year, I wanted to pursue a research project on aging. I met with Dr. George Kuchel, M.D. and Dr. Richard Fortinsky, Ph.D. from the Center on Aging and asked them to sponsor me for a competitive national research grant offered through the American Federation for Aging Research. My only connection with these two professors was the health center—I was a student and they were faculty members. With their guidance, I was awarded a grant to conduct a survey research project on Medicare Part D whereby I interviewed members in the community at senior centers and presented my data at a national meeting. Through this project, I not only learned more about research methods, public health, and older

adults, but also found two mentors, Drs. Kuchel and Fortinsky, who provided me guidance throughout the next three years in medical school. As a medical student within an integrated academic medical center, I was easily able to make these research connections and complete a substantial project.

Improving the facilities at JDH and attracting more faculty members will not only enhance medical care and research in the health center, but also enhance medical education inside and outside the classrooms and clinical floors. Most medical students steer away from doing rotations at JDH for the primary reason being less clinical exposure when compared to Hartford Hospital, St. Francis and even the Hospital of Central Connecticut. JDH, by far, has the best clinical teaching, but unfortunately the worst facilities and lowest patient caseload. The physicians at JDH chose to pursue a career in academics, meaning that medical education would be an essential part of their job. They are the ones who can quote medical studies, use evidence based medicine to make clinical decisions, and inspire medical students to appreciate the art of medicine. They are the ones that invite us into their homes and host us for interest group meetings. They are the ones who most often volunteer at our free clinics throughout Hartford. The physicians at JDH are the ones that the medical students seek out for career advice and in general, residency programs hold letters of recommendations from academic doctors higher in weight than those from physicians in private practice. The physicians at JDH serve as mentors in all aspects of medical students' lives and medical education. Without an integrated medical center, the essence of what defines the medical education at UConn will no longer exist.

As a graduating student, I am very proud of my medical education from the University of Connecticut. The faculty at the University of Connecticut Health Center inspired me to pursue a career in academics in which I plan to teach medical students and residents, provide outstanding patient care to the community, and investigate research questions. In the future, I hope to be employed by the University of Connecticut Health Center and work alongside my mentors to continue promoting excellence in medical education and transforming UConn into a center at the forefront of medicine.

Thank you for your dedication to Connecticut and your support of the UConn Health Center. Please consider supporting HB 6335 for the future of Connecticut's medical education.